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ABSTRACT

Incarcerated youth should be afforded the opportunity to develop the advanced academic and vocational skills needed to be competitive in today's labor market. Correctional facility administrators regard education as the most important component of the rehabilitation process. Correctional facilities must therefore make education and training high priorities rather than competitors with other programs. The educational and program administration strategies adopted in correctional facilities must be directed toward developing an effective comprehensive education program that includes basic academic and vocational education. Academic programs in correctional facilities should abandon the old assumption that basic skills must be mastered before students are given more advanced tasks such as problem solving, cognitive reasoning, reading comprehension, and written communication. Because as many as 40% of youth in correctional facilities have some learning disability, correctional education must employ staff trained and certified to provide a full spectrum of special education programs and services. Psychoeducational programming, employment training, and expanded/improved transitional services are also needed. Finally, progress in correctional education requires an increased level of research to identify effective educational programs and practices and provide legislators and funding agencies with the proof they require when determining policies and allocating resources. (MN)

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OJJDP Update on Research

John J. Wilson, Acting Administrator **October 1994**

Juvenile Correctional Education: A Time for Change

Robert J. Gemignani

For too long, education has been regarded as just another service for incarcerated youth. For too long, yesterday's pedagogy has failed to educate delinquent youth for today's world. It is time for change. This need for change is reflected in an 18-month study conducted by the National Office for Social Responsibility (NOSR). Dr. Osa Coffey and colleagues looked beyond traditional correctional education literature and research to include lessons learned from Job Corps and Job Training Partnership Act educational programs. The researchers analyzed the findings from Effective Schools research and from the U.S. Secretary of Labor's Commission for Achieving Necessary Skills.

Today's labor market demands a more comprehensive and advanced academic and vocational training curriculum. Incarcerated youth should be afforded the opportunity to develop their competitive skills and move beyond drill to tackle increasingly complicated tasks.

Addressing juvenile offenders' academic skills without paying equal attention to their social and moral reasoning is futile. Teachers in correctional institutions should incorporate innovative teaching methods to stimulate incarcerated youth to learn. Examples of effective educational practices follow.

Effective Schools

A school's learning and working environment determines its effectiveness.

- Education is regarded by facility administrators as the most important component of the rehabilitation process.
- Education and training are priorities, not competitors with other programs.
- The comprehensive education program includes basic academic skills, high school completion, general equivalency diploma (GED) preparation, special education, preemployment training, and other programs aimed at enhancing students' social, cognitive, and life skills.
- Student/teacher ratios reflect the needs of the students, the demands of the subject area, the availability of equipment and resources, and legal mandates.
- Academic achievement is reinforced through incentives, including diplomas and certificates.
- Academic programs ensure educational equity for all.
- Teachers are competent, committed, and active.
- Parents and community volunteers are involved in the academic program.

Administration

Effective administrators stress the need for education to be regarded as the centerpiece of the rehabilitation process by educational and correctional staff. They recruit high-quality teachers and provide them with equitable remuneration and adequate training opportunities.

- Education is regarded by correctional facility staff as the key component of each youth's program.
- Appropriate correctional school accreditation is maintained.

From the Administrator

While prevention intends to halt the progression from misbehavior to delinquency, and diversion seeks to provide alternative treatments to detention, a number of juvenile offenders require the setting and services of a secure correctional facility. The objective, however, remains the same: rehabilitation. Education is critical to the success of that mission. Today's demanding job market requires educated employees. Our society needs citizens with the knowledge of sound social and moral values and the will to act upon them.

I am encouraged by the findings of recent research conducted for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention on the latest and most effective practices in juvenile correctional education.

I commend the information provided by this bulletin to your attention and—as practical—implementation.

John J. Wilson
Acting Administrator

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- Periodic assessments are made of student and staff needs.

- Staff are trained in the procedures and principles of providing educational services in a correctional school setting.

- Staff are kept informed of current research on effective instructional strategies.

- Site-based management affords administrators and teachers the authority to change structures and practices while accepting responsibility for outcomes.

Academic Programs

A fundamental assumption underlying the academic curriculum in the past is that basic skills have to be mastered before students are given more advanced tasks, such as problem solving, cognitive reasoning, reading comprehension, and written communication. Current thinking challenges this concept. The new paradigm is based on the assumption that all students can succeed and that educationally disadvantaged students can profit from more challenging tasks.

Classrooms in correctional settings often reflect the old model, which emphasizes workbook exercises, remediation, drill, and practice in the basics. Under this model, educational assessments have focused on what students cannot do in order to provide remedial instruction. Classroom management has centered on discipline and control, with time-out periods in which unruly offenders are separated from other students. A more effective model involves changes in educational philosophy, curriculum, and instructional techniques.

- The academic curriculum features comprehension and complex problem-solving tasks, allowing students to develop their cognitive skills.

- The curriculum integrates basic skills into more challenging tasks that allow students to apply these skills to real-life situations.

- The curriculum allows for a number of discrete skills to be combined and applied to perform more complex tasks.

- Knowledge sharing is emphasized through cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and team problem solving.

- Teachers model cognitive processes through a variety of instructional strategies, including externalizing thought processes, encouraging multiple approaches to problem solving, and focusing on dialog and reciprocal learning.

- A variety of assessment and evaluation measures are used. Progress is based on mutually defined student goals emphasizing competence.

- Instruction involves multiple strategies appropriate to each learner's interests and needs.

- Reading, writing, and oral expression are interrelated.

Special Education

As many as 40 percent of youth in correctional facilities may have some form of learning disability. It is essential that correctional education employ trained and certified staff with the capacity and resources to provide a full spectrum of special education programs and services.

- Incarcerated youth with learning disabilities must be provided special education in full compliance with Federal and State law.

- Correctional staff should be trained to meet the mandates of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

- Essential components of an effective special education program include: (1) assessment of the deficits and learning needs, (2) a curriculum that meets each student's needs, (3) vocational training opportunities, (4) transitional services that link the correctional special education services to prior educational experiences and to the educational and human services needed after release, (5) a comprehensive range of education and related services, and (6) effective staff training.

- Youth with learning disabilities should be included in regular academic programs, classrooms, and educational activities to the greatest extent possible.

- Independent living, social, and vocational skills that prepare students for adult living supplement the regular academic program.

- The special education program should help youth in their transition between public schools and corrections or between corrections and independent living and work.

Psychoeducational Programming

Delinquents are often deficient in the cognitive problem-solving skills, moral reasoning, and communication and social skills essential for successful functioning in daily life. Sound juvenile correctional education programs enhance offenders' thinking and social skills while ameliorating their academic and vocational deficiencies.

- Such programs include a social metacognitive skills curriculum focusing on such areas as social interactions and communications, moral and spiritual values, problem solving, and conflict resolution.

- Students are assessed in social skills and cognitive reasoning.

- Social skills education is integrated into life at the facility.

- Opportunities are created for practicing and applying social skills in the community.

- Students are afforded opportunities to participate in school and facility governance.

- Academic and vocational instructors are trained in such instructional techniques as modeling, small-group discussions, and cooperative learning.

Employment Training

The majority of delinquents age 16 and older do not return to school after release from a correctional setting or do not graduate from high school. While correctional educators must find better ways to motivate students to return to school, they must also provide students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed in entry-level jobs.

- Education programs should afford students the opportunity to develop competencies in: (1) basic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics; (2) thinking skills such as creative thinking, decisionmaking, and problem solving; and (3) personal qualities such as responsibility, sociability, and honesty.

- Students should develop workplace competencies: (1) using resources and staff, (2) working productively with others on teams, (3) acquiring and using information, (4) understanding and utilizing systems, and (5) using technology.

- Opportunities should be provided students to apply knowledge through on-the-job training, work experience, internships, apprenticeships, mentorships, or observing workers on the job.

- Students develop a portfolio that includes credentials, work samples, work history, resume, letters of recommendation, relevant community service, and extracurricular experiences.

- Partnerships are developed with employers to enhance current programs and provide postrelease support for students.

Transitional Services

Expanded and improved transitional services are needed to bridge the gap from community schools to correctional facilities, and from correctional facilities to home or independent living. Lack of services may undo many of the benefits students have received through their educational programs while incarcerated. Effective transitional programs will increase the students' rate of reenrollment in school, their high school graduation rate, and their success in independent living and employment.

- Incarcerated youth are provided opportunities to acquire social skills, survival skills, independent living skills, preemployment training, and law-related education.

- Incarcerated youth have access to a comprehensive library that contains a variety of materials related to transitional services.

- Student records are transferred in a timely fashion between the releasing and the receiving institutions.

- Educational information is used to make prompt and appropriate placements.

- Students are scheduled and preregistered prior to their reentry into community schools.

Program Evaluation and Research

Progress in correctional education requires an increased level of research. Process as well as outcome research—especially scientifically designed, rigorous evaluation studies of effective educational programs and practices—is needed to assist practitioners. Legislators and funding agencies demand proof of effectiveness in determining policies and allocating resources.

- Student intake data are collected and maintained in a systematic manner to provide a baseline for student achievement. Performance data are linked to specific skill areas and competencies.

- Each student's progress is evaluated regularly, and cumulative data are maintained for evaluating programs and staff. Evaluations are curriculum-based and assess mastery of specific competencies by students, individually and in the aggregate.

- Juvenile correctional administrators encourage and provide time and resources for correctional education staff to participate in and conduct correctional education evaluation and research.

- Corrections education research should be conducted in accordance with conventional standards of social science research.

- Research findings are published and disseminated to other practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and legislators and disseminated via existing information systems and clearinghouses.

The Next Step

As OJJDP continues its efforts to enhance juvenile corrections education, it seeks to demonstrate the effective educational practices cited above. Demonstration sites will be provided intensive onsite training and technical assistance to transform corrections education from a supportive service to the centerpiece of the incarcerated juvenile's institutional experience.

For Further Information

The 193-page research report from which this bulletin is derived is available from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse for $15.00. To order a copy of *Effective Practices in Juvenile Correctional Education: A Study of the Literature and Research 1980–1992* (NCJ150066) write the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850, or call 800–638–8736.

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